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## THE TIN SOLDIER.

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**T**HE commandant of Fort Matthias Pushkin stood on the battlements, scanning the horizon anxiously. Away off to the east, where the great Siberian plain met the sky, outlined against the blue as they moved upon the top of a little rise, could be seen a strange procession of huge hemispherical objects, tolling along like a train of monster turtles.

It was a horde of the Bashkir Tartars, with their traveling house-tents, and although they were miles away, the groaning and screaming of the ungreased wooden axles of the countless wheels of the tent-carriages, borne on a gentle wind could be heard at the fort.

Scores of horses tugged at each great tent-carriage, clouds of horsemen hovered about the flanks of the caravan and an immense herd of horses followed in the rear.

Ivan, the courier of Orenburg, had been right. The Bashkir Tartars had revolted against the Russian rule and were coming to attack Fort Matthias Pushkin.

Angered at what they considered excessive demands for tribute, the Bashkirs had muttered against the Russians for a long time, but none of the garrison of the fort had dreamed that they would revolt.

The Governor of the province had placed such great trust in their allegiance, that company after company of the three regiments which once formed the garrison of Matthias Pushkin had been withdrawn, until only four companies remained—barely enough to man the three exposed sides of the fort, for the southern wall needed no defenders, abutting upon the top of a very high, inaccessible sandstone bluff, that rose directly from the bed of the river, now almost dry in the heat of summer, but a swollen torrent in winter.

Major Podonoff, the commandant, ordered the assembly to be sounded, and gave his directions to the soldiers for their stations during the night. Every one commenced making preparations for the conflict, which few believed would take place, yet which might take place within a few hours.

The field-pieces of the fort were placed in the embrasures, boxes of ammunition were opened and cartridges distributed, muskets cleaned and put in order, and, as the last rays of the sun, sinking behind the dark masses of the distant Ural mountains, gleamed upon the shining helmet of the statue of a soldier that stood in the centre of the parade ground, all was in readiness.

Back in the foothills of the mountains, three years before, some masses of tin had been discovered, and forthwith costly appliances were brought to the out-of-the-way place and great shafts were sunk.

From the first tin taken out of the mine, a life-size statue of a soldier was cast and set up in the parade ground of the fort.

Beyond the tin first discovered and that which had entered into the composition of the soldier, none was ever found in the mine. The workmen returned to Russia and the machinery rotted and rusted away.

Major Podonoff did not appreciate the severely simple in art, and by his commands the statue had been painted—all except the helmet; but the soldiers saw in this figure, with its bright blue coat and row of gilt buttons, its gray trousers and white belt, its pink face and staring black eyes, the military spirit of their fatherland, and revered it accordingly.

The tin soldier was always on guard. His face was always turned toward the East, the quarter of danger; and, whether it should be a horde of nomad Tartars in petty revolt, or a vast Chinese army—the vanguard of the swarming millions which the mysterious empire of the Orient threatened to some day send against its Russian neighbors—his eyes would be the first to see them.

The soldiers often talked about him, standing sturdily there, staring steadily and boldly before him, and, little by little, came to regard him as a protecting genius, and half-believed that in the event of danger he would step down from his pedestal and fight side by side with them.

When night had fallen, scouts were sent out into the plain to bring word of the first movement of attack. At ten o'clock the scouts returned, and reported that the Tartar troops were moving toward the fort in dead silence.

The garrison was assembled, and the men told off to their places. When the troops were all on the ramparts, Major Podonoff determined to see if he could make the enemy betray their whereabouts by sending a shell into their midst.

He was standing by the largest howitzer in the fort, lanyard in hand, ready to fire the piece as soon as Corporal Andrew Bielaky should finish sighting it in the supposed direction of the enemy, when the old ordnance sergeant touched him on the arm.

"Madam Podonoff desires you to send a soldier to stand guard in the hallway. She is afraid to be alone there with her two little girls and the little Alexis."

"What can she be afraid of?" asked the major, testily. "The house is on the edge of the bluff, and there can be no attack on that side. The house will only be reached when the garrison has been defeated here, and in that case all will be lost, and it will make no difference whether there be one or ten soldiers on guard in the hallway. She will be best protected by having every man here—and every man is needed here, too."

"She would like Andrew Bielaky to be the guard. She knows him to be a trusty man."

"Bielaky—our best cannoneer? He is needed here, as well as every other man. Alexis is ten years old. Give him a musket, and let him stand guard. The tin soldier is the only soldier of the garrison of Matthias Pushkin who is not on the ramparts. Take him to be a guard for Madam Podonoff."

Boom! went the howitzer. The shell hurtled through the air and burst, but no sound of Tartar shrieks or shouts followed its explosion.

"I wonder if the major was in earnest

when he told me to put the tin soldier in the hallway to be a guard for Madam Podonoff?" said the ordnance sergeant to himself. "I will obey him, at any rate, for there can be no question in that case."

He called the ordnance squad together, and they began the task of dislodging the tin soldier from his pedestal and taking him to the major's quarters.

"I am glad the mine contained so little tin that they made the soldier hollow," said the sergeant, as they stretched the tin soldier on a pair of trucks. "He's heavy enough, as it is."

With much bumping and thumping, the tin soldier was placed in the corner of the hallway by the front door. Madam Podonoff heard the noise, and, leaning over the stair-rail, looked down into the dimly-lighted hall.

"What is it?" she asked.

"A soldier, mistress, to stand guard," replied the sergeant.

"Is it Andrew Bielaky?"

"No, mistress, it is another soldier, but he has a stout heart," replied the sergeant.

Madam Podonoff looked at the tin soldier as he stood there in the dim light, heels close together, clasping his musket tightly, and staring fiercely at Major Podonoff's bear-skin overcoat that hung on the hat-rack opposite. She had no thought but that it was a real soldier, and went back to her room much comforted.

In the parlor sat Alexis Podonoff, reading. It was long past his usual bedtime, but occupied in calming the fears of the two little girls, his mother had forgotten him, and, boy-like, he never went to bed until told to do so.

The firing of the cannon had not disturbed him, nor had he bothered his mind to find a reason why the ordnance sergeant had placed the tin soldier in the hall, for he was deep in the marvelous story of another tin soldier, having selected the story, on account of its title, from a volume of Hans Christian Andersen's fairy tales that had been presented to him the day before.

At last he finished the story and leaned back in his chair. The cannonading had ceased some time before, and all was silent in the fort.

He heard a slight rustling sound in the next room, and, opening the door, discovered the Tartar maid-servant, Kasya, hauling from a closet a rope-ladder, which was one of his most cherished possessions.

The Podonoff house had been built in a space that was made by removing part of the southern wall of the fort. The house completely filled the space and really formed part of the wall. The rear piazza of the house extended to the top of the bluff. By fastening the rope ladder to the piazza railing, Alexis was enabled to descend to the river for a bath, or to fish, while to reach the river in any other way required a mile or more.

"What are you doing with my rope ladder?" asked Alexis, angrily.

"I—I was going to use it for a clothes-line," stammered the Tartar girl.

"There are plenty of other ropes that you can use without your tearing my ladder to pieces," said Alexis.

Kasya flushed hotly.

"I shall tell your mother if you don't go right to bed. She will make you go, and punish you, too, for sitting up so late."

Alexis begged her not to tell his mother, but the girl would not relent, so he went back into the parlor, turned down the lamp, stepped into the hall and ensconced himself behind the tin soldier.

In a short time he heard Kasya come into the parlor, walk around and go out. She had apparently satisfied herself that he had gone to bed.

He crept back to his book and was soon deep in another story, and, although he heard a few slight noises in the back part of the house, he thought it imprudent to again investigate their cause.

An hour passed. He heard stealthy steps in the next room, and, thinking that it was Kasya coming to send him to bed, he hid behind the tin soldier once more.

The steps entered the parlor. They approached the door. He heard the sound of heavy breathing and saw the shock head of a Tartar warrior peer into the hall. The head turned, its little, pig-like eyes fell on the tin soldier, and it quickly drew back.

Alexis watched the doorway, speechless with terror.

Minutes passed, and then he saw a hand, and in the hand a knife, resting on the door-sill, and then another hand, and the head and body of the Tartar, creeping through the door.

The Tartar was coming to kill the tin soldier, and, when he found that the soldier was not a real one, what would become of Alexis?

Silently, slowly, the Tartar crept, but the tin soldier stood staring before him and noticed nothing. The Tartar crept nearer, half arose, drew back his arm, ready to strike, when a shriek burst on the air.

Alexis leaped from his hiding-place; the tin soldier, disturbed by the sudden movement, tottered and fell crash upon the kneeling Tartar.

Alexis bounded through the outer door, and, in response to his cries, soldiers came hurrying up. The long roll sounded. Dark figures were issuing from the doors and windows of the Podonoff house. The house was full of Tartars.

The Russians charged and fought them in a hand-to-hand struggle, pushed them back through the house and hurled them over the bluff.

The southern wall was manned, signal rockets were fired, and by their light could be seen a mass of Tartars fleeing down the river-bed from the scattering fusillade above.

Almost before the fight was over, Alexis entered the house. In the entry lay the dead body of the shock-headed Tartar, killed by

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